

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 15, 2012

Suzanne H. Segal

Judge Suzanne H. Segal's career has taken her from Capitol Hill to the federal bench.

By Pat Alston

Daily Journal Staff Writer

LOS ANGELES - A job on Capitol Hill led U.S. Magistrate Judge Suzanne H. Segal to the law.

The summer after she graduated from college, Segal followed a couple of friends to Washington, D.C., where volunteer opportunities were plentiful.

She quickly found a spot with Clarence "Doc" Long, the Democratic U.S. congressman from Maryland whose encouragement of refugees in Pakistan during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan is depicted in the film "Charlie Wilson's War."

"He was engaged in a lot of interesting work," Segal said of Long, chairman of the Subcommittee on Foreign Operations of the House Appropriations Committee.

Within a month, she landed a paid position as a "legislative correspondent," a staffer who responds to constituent mail.

"You couldn't have had a better job right out of college," Segal said.

The next year, during Long's ultimately unsuccessful bid for a 12th term in the House of Representatives, Segal worked as assistant to his press secretary. She then returned to the classroom.



In the 25 years since her graduation from Cornell Law School, Segal has worked as a business litigator, assistant U.S. attorney and federal magistrate judge. In January, she began a four-year term as chief magistrate judge of the Central District, which covers a wide seven-county swath of Southern California, from Riverside to San Luis Obispo.

In addition to her leadership role, she handles preliminary proceedings in criminal cases, as well as misdemeanor trials and dispositions. She spends most of her time, however, presiding over a busy civil docket that includes discovery hearings, settlement conferences and other pretrial mat-

ters. With the consent of the parties, she handles cases from start to finish.

What Segal finds particularly rewarding is the role she plays in settlement hearings.

"Helping parties find ways to resolve their disputes without the expense and challenges of litigation is one of the most satisfying things we can do here," Segal said.

Lawyers say her work ethic, legal acumen and respectfulness make her an ideal bench officer.

Linda Miller Savitt, a partner with Ballard Rosenberg Golper & Savitt LLP, said she has spent time with Segal in a couple of difficult-to-settle mediations and found her to be

polite yet straightforward.

"She's never rude, just very direct," said Savitt, who represents management in labor and employment disputes. "She just hones right in on the issues."

Segal has a calming effect on everyone when settlement issues become intense, Savitt said.

"She's good at diffusing situations," she said. "She doesn't get ruffled."

Assistant U.S. Attorney Rupa Goswami, who has had many detention hearings before Segal, said the judge creates "a very comfortable environment" in her courtroom.

Although she's on the reserved side, Segal is not one to give you a "cold chill," Goswami said.

"She doesn't cut people off," Goswami said. "She is very pleasant."

When considering search warrants on an urgent matter, Segal moves expeditiously, the prosecutor said. She's not a rubber stamp, however. She's very thorough and asks "smart questions," Goswami said.

Kenneth G. Parker, an intellectual property and trademark lawyer, described Segal as diligent, professional and "appropriately firm ... when necessary but not unnecessarily harsh."

"She's respectful of the attorneys and the parties," said

Parker, a partner at Haynes & Boone LLP.

Parker, who has appeared before Segal several times on discovery motions and settlement conferences, said the judge is thoughtful and always prepared. "She's always read everything," he said.

"She is not afraid to make an unpopular decision," said Deputy Federal Public Defender Firdaus F. Dordi, adding the judge has made some "gutsy decisions" on bail requests in drug cases.

"Whether or not she grants or denies bail, she explains herself," he said.

"She really is pretty much all you could ask for in a judge," Parker said.

Segal, a Los Angeles native and one of four children, grew up on the city's Westside. Her father, a psychiatrist, immigrated to the United States as a boy and became a naturalized citizen while serving in the Army during World War II. Her mother, who has a passion for textiles, returned to college in her 50s for a master's degree in fine arts.

After graduating with University High School's Class of 1978, Segal enrolled at Claremont McKenna College, where she majored in political science and history. Four years later, she took off for Washington without a clue where life would take her. Her work on "The Hill," she said, gave her a little understanding of the le-

gal system, so after two years she enrolled in law school.

Between her second and third years, she returned to Los Angeles to work as a summer associate at Adams, Duque & Hazeltine, which offered her a post-graduate job doing basic business litigation. When two litigators moved to Dewey Ballantine (later Dewey & LeBoeuf LLP) and invited her to apply for a job with the firm, she took them up on the offer.

Within a year or so, she was given a small case to shepherd, she said, which included the final arbitration.

"I just had such a good time doing that case," she said.

She wanted more. A friend told her a good place to get that kind of hands-on litigation was at the U.S. attorney's office, where young lawyers were given more responsibility and more trial opportunity, she said. So in 1990, she left private practice for public service. She joined the civil division, where she handled a wide variety of civil matters including employment, civil rights, tort and regulatory enforcement litigation.

"It was a fantastic move - a dream job," she said.

She especially enjoyed appellate work, which assistant U.S. attorneys handle themselves. She later supervised that work.

"I probably could have stayed in the U.S. attorney's

office the rest of my career," she said. "I was very happy there."

But in 2000, the Central District announced openings for five new magistrate judge slots, she said, so she applied and received an appointment.

She and her husband, Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge John L. Segal, who recently transferred from Santa Monica to the civil courthouse in downtown Los Angeles, carpool as often as possible.

Off the bench, she enjoys spending time with her two children, bicycling along the beach with her husband and playing tennis, although as "an aging tennis player," she quipped, she must contend with the "aches and pains" that accompany a good workout on the court.

Here are some of Judge Segal's cases and the lawyers involved:

Maranatha High School v. City of Sierra Madre, CV 03-00082 - land use under the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act

For the plaintiffs: Elizabeth Watson, Greenberg Glusker Fields Claman & Machtinger LLP, Los Angeles, and J. Russell Tyler Jr., Law Offices of J. Russell Tyler, San Clemente

For the defendants: Michael G. Colantuono, Colantuono & Levin PC, Penn Valley

Kara Technology Inc. v.

Stamps.com Inc., CV 05-01890 - patent infringement

For the plaintiff: Robert C. Scheinfeld, Baker Botts LLP, New York

For the defendant: Philip J. Graves, Snell & Wilmer LLP, Los Angeles

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission v. Catholic Healthcare West, CV 06-01915 - sex discrimination

For the plaintiff: Derek W. Li, EEOC, Los Angeles

For the defendant: Linda Miller Savitt, Ballard Rosenberg Golper & Savitt LLP, Glendale, and John J. Manier, formerly with Ballard Rosenberg and now with Nassiri & Jung LLP, Los Angeles

Buena Vista Home Entertainment Inc. v. Blockbuster Inc., SACV 03-01008 - contract dispute

For the plaintiff: Gregory P. Barbee, Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton LLP, Los Angeles, and Sanford M. Litvack, Hogan Lovells, New York

For the defendant: Marshall B. Grossman, Bingham McCutchen LLP, Santa Monica

Callahan v. Paramount Pictures Corp., SACV 08-01407 - Americans with Disabilities Act and California civil rights laws

For the plaintiff: Jeffrey A. Harrison, Barbosa, Metz & Harrison LLP, El Segundo

For the defendants: Thomas J. Leanse, Katten Muchin Rosenman LLP, Los Angeles